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ABSTRACT

Successful collective bargaining and, if necessary, strike management, requires careful planned communication strategies and programs before, during, and after, if the school system is to maintain the public's confidence. This handbook is designed to provide guidelines for the educational administrative team in developing a communication plan that is the keystone in handling a strike or work stoppage crisis. Although the communicating tips are directed at school board members and the administrative team, the resulting communications should have positive influence on students, teachers, administrators, support personnel, parents, taxpayers, and community members. The communication roles played by school board members, superintendents, negotiators, communication specialists, and principals are dealt with during all phases of negotiations. (Author/MLF)

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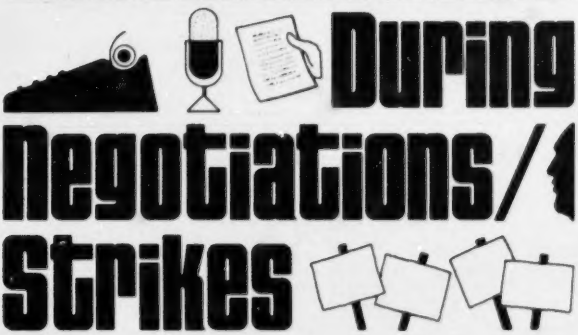

A Communication Handbook from the National School Public Relations Association

1976

National School Public Relations Association
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, Virginia 22209

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Foreword

Communicating During Negotiations/Strikes is a National School Public Relations Assn. communications handbook designed to assist all members of the school administrative team in the development of positive school/community relations. Successful collective bargaining and, if necessary, strike management, requires carefully planned communication strategies and programs if the school system is to maintain the public's confidence – before, during and after.

Communicating During Negotiations/Strikes is a handbook designed to provide guidelines for the educational administrative team in developing a communication plan which is the keystone in handling a strike or work stoppage crisis. So while the communicating tips in this handbook are directed at school board members and the administrative team, the resulting communications should have a positive influence on the entire school family – students, teachers, administrators, support personnel, parents, taxpayers and community members.

It should be noted that in some parts of the country teachers' groups formed for the purpose of collective bargaining are called unions, in other parts associations. Principals and superintendents are referred to as administrators or management. Strikes may be termed work stoppages. Publicly elected or appointed school governance groups are directors or board members and collective bargaining is negotiating, meeting, conferring or merely agreement on conditions of employment. These terms are used interchangeably within the text.

Whatever the terms used and whatever the final outcomes of negotiations in terms of salaries or fringe benefits, the key

result must be the continuation of a smoothly functioning, efficient and effective system of public education: a system where all members of the educational team work together. The National School Public Relations Assn. has adopted as its goal "advancing the cause of education through responsible communication" and the development of this handbook is one step toward providing insights for a responsible communication plan during negotiations and strikes.

The book was written by J. William Jones, director of informational services for the School District of Philadelphia and an expert in negotiations and strike communication plans.

The association is appreciative of the contributions by experts in this field who furnished materials, ideas and suggestions for content: Barbara Rosenberg, administrative assistant for curriculum/public information, San Rafael (Calif.) City Schools; William E. Henry, associate director, American Assn. of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.; John Holton, public information officer, Wilmington (Del.) Public Schools; Kenneth K. Muir, director of information, Montgomery County, Md. Schools; William Pharis, executive director, National Assn. of Elementary School Principals, Arlington, Va.; Robert Sethre, administrative assistant, Olympia (Wash.) School District; Ann Barkelew, public information officer, Los Angeles County (Calif.) Schools; Edward Martens, assistant executive director, Manitoba (Canada) Assn. of School Trustees; Virginia M. Ross, NSPRA director of school communication services, and Robert L. Chisholm, superintendent of schools, Clover Park School District No. 400, Lakewood Center, Wash.

Communicating During Negotiations/Strikes was edited by Cynthia Menand, NSPRA director of editorial and production services; production services: Debbie Lucckese, Janet Eaffy, Jenny McAllister and Lyn Broad; John H. Wherry, editorial director.

Overview

It has been said many times and in many ways.

The American Assn. of Scho Administrators (AASA), in its handbook, *Work Stoppage Strategies*, says succinctly:

> In a school strike, which side prevails will largely be determined by which side of the issue most effectively conveys its message to the community.

Across the country, Robert F. Savitt, superintendent of schools in the Plainview-Old Bethpage (N.Y.) Central School District, sees it much the same:

> There are many horror stories that can be told of the unpreparedness of school districts to handle crises that develop when a negotiations impasse occurs or a teachers' strike takes place. Because of the unpreparedness of school authorities to handle such a crisis situation, teacher groups in many instances have been able to gain public support and back school boards to the wall because they have developed a very careful game plan for communicating with the public. The development of a detailed set of administrative and communication procedures, set up weeks or months in advance of negotiations, is the best insurance against the confusion and chaos that come when poor communication procedures are put into effect at the last minute.

Louise Stoll, director and past president of the Berkeley (Calif.) Unified School District school board, puts it this way:

> The board image of integrity, responsible leadership and devotion providing good education for children is easily tarnished in a labor dispute. A just settlement depends as much on the board's ability to project an image of reasonableness and integrity as on the soundness of its fiscal positions. Yet, an examination of public sector labor disputes reveals an appalling failure of the public employer to adequately communicate its position – prior to, during and after a strike.

It is no secret, then, that communication plays perhaps the single most vital role in the complexities and emotions of a school strike. Good communication can help prevent a strike, it can help bring order out of chaos during a strike, or it can be the adhesive that puts the broken pieces back together again after the strike is over.

The dictionary defines the word communicate, "to impart knowledge of; make known." Communicating sounds simple, and it should be. But anyone who has been caught in the middle of the whirlpool that is a school strike knows from sad experience that the simple act of communicating just isn't simple anymore.

Donald G. Brossman, executive director of the New York State School Boards Assn., puts it this way:

> Communicating effectively is seldom easy; it requires planning, effort, understanding and follow-through. Communicating effectively in the tense atmosphere which often surrounds a crisis requires redoubled effort, greater understanding and increased attention to proper planning.

And that is exactly what this handbook is all about: increased attention to proper planning for communication **before, during** and **after** a strike.

This handbook will, in as objective and dispassionate a way as possible, deal with the communication roles played by a myriad of persons – school board members, superintendents, negotiators, communication specialists and principals, among others – during all phases of negotiations.

As Billings, Mont., principal H.C. Christiansen told a seminar session on school strikes at the 1976 convention of the National Assn. of Elementary School Principals at Atlantic City, N.J.:

You'd better be prepared. It can happen anywhere.

Chapter 1

In the Beginning

When To Go Public

When negotiations begin, it is a generally accepted procedure – and one that is recommended here – that no *partisan* statements be issued by either side.

Certainly the media – depending on the size of the community – may want statements from day one, and someone may even slip them a full copy of the teachers' demands.

If you are a superintendent, or a school board chairman or a chief negotiator, the first step most probably will be to answer the questions: What do you think of the demands? Are you going to give in? Do you think they're fair? How much will they cost? Do you expect a strike? Etc., etc., etc. And these are legitimate questions.

And just as legitimate is the answer: "We have a lot of ground to cover, a lot of points to consider. We'll discuss the union's positions one-by-one over the conference table, and I'm sure that with both sides bargaining in good faith, eventually we'll come to a fair and equitable settlement."

In other words, don't be talked by the media into making tough, harsh statements, statements that will make negotiations more difficult right from the beginning, and statements you more than likely will have to back down on at a later date.

It might be best to keep in mind, at this beginning stage of negotiations, the words of the anonymous bard who wrote:

I'm careful of the words I say,
To keep them soft and sweet.
I never know from day to day,
Which ones I'll have to eat.

Good advice on this subject comes from Edward J. Martens, assistant executive director of the Manitoba (Canada) Assn. of School Trustees. He contends:

> The objective of collective bargaining is settlement, not dispute, confrontation or antagonism. The latter will happen often enough without a catalyst. Communicating your 'opinions' externally on the subject of employe demands and employer position often entrenches feelings and bars effective negotiations.

All right, but what happens if – or perhaps, when – the teachers' association, dissatisfied with the progress of negotiations, fires off the first broadside, usually in the form of a harsh statement to the media charging the board with all kinds of unfair bargaining practices?

More good advice here comes from Robert Sethre, administrative assistant for the Olympia (Wash.) Public Schools. He says:

> Propaganda is a union strategy. It is important for management to understand this concept – particularly in districts where formalized bargaining is relatively new. Communications during the bargaining process, whether directed to employes, the press or the community at large, have one major purpose: to put pressure on the superintendent and the board.
>
> The union wants management to react. For this reason, union leaders often make provocative, inflammatory – even insulting – statements in their bulletins, newsletters and press releases. School board members and superintendents sometimes are shocked by these statements.
>
> The statements may not represent the consensus of the teachers. They may have been written by an outsider. They may seem unfair and misleading. The natural temptation is to reply, to set the record straight.

But, Sethre warns, a rebuttal by management at this time – particularly one delivered in the heat of emotion – may hinder rather than help the negotiations process.

When you are tempted to return the union broadside with one of your own, Sethre says, consider the following points before answering:

- Extreme statements by union leaders often will backfire. The news media, parents and community leaders – or for that matter, the rank and file of the teachers – rarely are gullible enough to believe wild charges by union leaders. That's not to say that the newspapers won't give them a lot of ink, and the teachers won't hope that such tough talk will result in a better settlement. But rash statements from either side of the bargaining table have little long-lasting effect on the bargaining process, except to damage the credibility of the people who make them.

- Antagonistic responses from management may encourage community support for the "underdog" employes.

- Sharp replies from management may take the spotlight away from the basic issues and focus it on relatively extraneous matters, wasting valuable time and energy in the process.

- Rifts between union spokesmen and the board or administration often are interpreted as rifts with the teachers themselves, even if this is not the case.

- The more the issues are argued openly and loudly by teachers, administrators and board members, the less confidence the community has in its teachers, administrators and board members.

- Charges and countercharges aired in the media tend to polarize positions and to delay settlement by creating a climate counter-productive to the good faith compromise that eventually must come.

Columbus, Ohio, attorney Bob Baker, who represents school boards in teacher contract negotiations, puts it this way:

> The most pathetic situation I think I've ever experienced was when representatives of the teachers' association and the board of education . . . were in a closed room and the board was saying, "Gee, I wish we hadn't said that and there was something we could do about it." And the teachers' association was making the same kind of statement. But the damage had been done. There was just no way at that time to save face.

Meanwhile, of course, plenty of intensive planning should be going into a procedure to communicate accurately, clearly and quickly with the media, staff, parents and community in case of a negotiations impasse.

For in all but those Utopian situations where management and union amicably reach a settlement, shake hands and live happily ever after, somewhere along the line the management negotiating team will inevitably have to take its case to the public.

It may come in answer to the union's public relations campaign; it may come by order of the board of education when a strike is inevitable, or it may come after pressure from the community to let them know where things stand. No matter the impetus, it will almost always come.

Taking Your Case to the Public

Talking to the Philadelphia Public Relations Assn. shortly after Watergate broke wide open, United Press International White House Correspondent Helen Thomas said that former President Richard Nixon, in dealing with the press and the public, failed to realize that trying to restore one's credibility was just about the same as trying to restore one's virginity.

About the same time, David Rossie, education editor for the Binghamton (N.Y.) *Evening Press*, told a crisis communications seminar sponsored by the New York State School Boards Assn., "School boards that behave as if they have a lot to hide usually do."

The management negotiating team would do well to remember the advice of these two reporters as it plans to communicate its position to the community. The moral of both stories is, if you're going to go public, do it all the way. Be open and frank and fully truthful. Don't accentuate the positive and hide the negative, because, like garbage, the longer the negative is hidden, the worse it smells when it finally gets out in the open.

And the loss of credibility in the community will have a direct, adverse effect on that side's strength at the bargaining table.

Naming a Spokesperson

The first question faced by the management team embarking on a campaign to communicate its position to the community is who

should be the spokesperson. While it is generally agreed that there should be only **one** spokesperson, at least during the negotiations phase, it is not generally agreed **who** this should be.

It is the contention here that the spokesperson should **not**, if possible, be the superintendent of schools. It is the superintendent who must pick up the pieces and paste them back together again after any strike. And for him or her to assume an adversary role with the teachers at any stage of the negotiations or strike is a serious mistake. It's pretty tough for a superintendent to heal the wounds if he/she inflicted some of them.

It is also the contention here that the spokesperson should **not** be the president of the board of education. The board president more than likely will still be the board president after a strike, and if he or she has been involved in a running verbal battle with the union, that battle most probably will perpetuate itself at board meetings long after the strike has been settled. It may prove difficult for the board president to keep quiet, for he or she most likely will be the target of any union broadsides. But in the long run, charge and countercharge on the part of the president of the board will benefit neither the board nor the community it serves.

The most obvious spokesperson during negotiations, then, would be the chief negotiator. He or she is usually an accomplished negotiator, eloquent, and, most important, in full command of all the facts involved in the negotiations process. The chief negotiator is in the best position to know what should be said and what shouldn't and how statements will affect what is going on across the bargaining table.

How About the Communications Specialist?

The role of the school communication specialist, or coordinator of community relations, or director of public relations, or whatever the title may be, should be, at this point, a supportive one to the chief spokesperson.

The PR specialist should be in close contact with the negotiating team, sitting in on its caucuses, asking questions, keeping totally up on the issues and the action across the bargaining table.

The PR specialist should use his or her expertise to advise the chief spokesperson on press and public relations and on suggested content of written statements.

It is highly conceivable that those directly connected with the day-to-day grind and emotion of negotiations, particularly at the

point when both sides are vying for public backing, may not be able to see the public relations forest for the trees; that they may become so involved with their position on a particular matter that they may not be able to see the PR problems of communicating that position to the public.

It is here that the PR specialist can be of invaluable help to the negotiating team and its communication efforts. Thus it is the consensus of experienced school PR people around the country that the PR specialist should not sit at the bargaining table.

William Martin, director of publications information services for the Ohio Education Assn. puts it this way:

> I think I'm more objective by looking at the situation with some freshness and being able to poke a few holes in the strategy, like what questions may be asked by reporters, than I would be if I had been at the session.
>
> I think the weariness of being there all day and all night, getting all emotionally involved with the superintendent, the school board president or the teacher association president can sometimes limit your objectivity.
>
> So I prefer not to be at the table. But I do insist that if I am working with our negotiators, our association people, that they brief me totally on what happened.

The opposite view is expressed by Ned Hopkins, former assistant executive secretary of the New York United Teachers and who contends:

> I find that if I am at the table I have better news judgment than the people usually negotiating. Second, I know how to talk with newsmen, what they want and what they don't want. And in the biggest action I was in, a Los Angeles strike, I was the only PR person at the table because, initially at least, the board refused to allow their PR people to sit in on the negotiations. The consequence was that when newsmen wanted to know what was happening, even in a general way or as a backgrounder, they always came to me. I was the one person they knew who was actually there.

Clearly, it can work both ways. But while the association PR person may have the negotiations as his or her only assignment for

the duration, the school district PR person has many other duties, too. So it is still the contention here that the chief negotiator/chief spokesperson, in close cooperation with the district PR or communications person, can function as an effective spokesman for the team.

Dealing with the Media

Most reporters, contrary to opinion in some education circles, are human beings. They have a job to do and most of them have been professionally trained to do it. That job is reporting the news. And a school strike, in just about any community anywhere, is news.

So when a school strike is imminent, you can be sure you will be dealing with the local news media.

As a matter of fact, the management team needs the news media. In school districts served by daily newspapers, radio and TV, the media will be the quickest way to get information out into the community. News outlets, says AASA, are the "primary sources" looked to by parents and community organizations seeking information about a strike situation.

And as Berkeley School Board Director Louise Stoll puts it: "School boards are not nearly as well prepared as employe organizations to wage communications warfare." Teacher organizations, she says, "have excellent public relations departments that have specialized in the field of influencing public decision making and opinion during a labor dispute." It is "extremely common," she adds, for national or state teacher organizations "to send well-trained, paid professionals into a community when a labor dispute is developing, or is in progress, to assist the local units in presenting their side of the story."

Stoll points out that the California Teachers Assn. has published a media communications manual for teacher organizers in which teachers are given specific instructions on how to get to the media "in a manner most likely to cause hostile reaction toward the board."

She contends that this type of communication is not necessarily designed to inform the public about the actual facts surrounding the issues, but is often effective in rousing an inconvenienced public to antagonism toward the public employer.

"The only effective method of combating this type of propaganda," she says, "is for the board, or public relations specialist

designated by the board, to be available to the media, skilled at responding to oversimplifications and allegations and aggressive in making initial statements concerning the major issues in dispute."

Adds AASA:

> Although the school administration does not have to (nor probably should it) react to every news release or news conference held by the striking employes, it is essential that the school administration does not adopt a 'No Comment' position.
>
> All that does is provide the other side in the controversy with all, or most, of the available newspaper and broadcast space or time. Nothing makes teacher organization public relations personnel more pleased than to see a newspaper story indicating that the superintendent or other school information officer was not available for comment, or had 'No Comment.'

Once the management team makes the decision to go to the media, several guidelines should be followed in communicating with members of the press, radio and TV:

- Don't tell them what to write. A school management spokesperson telling a reporter what he or she should report is just about the same as a reporter telling an educator how to educate. If you start browbeating the media, your communications campaign is sputtering already. Give the reporter the facts, the full facts, concerning management's position on the major negotiations issues. Give them honestly and frankly and leave it up to the reporter how to construct the story. It rarely will be written just the way you'd like it written – the reporter is trying to report objectively on both sides of the issues – but it usually will be written fairly.

- While a statement issued to reporters should be in writing to give both them and yourself a record of just what statement was issued, don't hesitate to answer reporters' questions about the statement. No one can put everything in one statement, and it is the reporter's job to ask questions to clarify every issue.

- Don't attempt to speak "off the record" unless asked to by the media. If a media person requests a background, off-the-record conference on a negotiations issue or issues,

that's one thing. Oblige them. But don't stand up in front of media representatives, issue a statement and then tell them it's off the record. In this case, if they don't agree first to consider a statement or portion of it off the record, they have absolutely no obligation not to report what you say.

- Don't use jargon. You're not bargaining over multivariate cognitive and affective educational objectives. You're bargaining over a variety of educational programs. You're not hung up over the number of language arts supportive personnel. They're reading aides. Keep it simple and clear; short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.

- Be scrupulously accurate. Off-hand, unresearched, inaccurate remarks to the media will quickly come back over the bargaining table to haunt the negotiating team.

- Don't call the other side names. Regardless of the old "sticks and stones may break my bones" advice, names can hurt you, if you use them. When grown people start calling other grown people names, they lose credibility in the community, particularly if they are members of the board of education or top school officials who are supposed to know better. If you're baited, steer clear of the hook. A few words said publicly in anger can set bargaining back for days.

- Don't play favorites. Many school boards and superintendents have a favorite reporter. And that's fine if it helps in getting day-to-day school news in the paper or on the air during the regular school term. But if you start playing favorites during the clamor of news coverage of a major strike, the rest of the media will seek other sources, like the union leaders, for instance.

- Don't *ever* say, *"This is our final offer."* In bargaining there rarely is such a thing as a "final" offer. You know it, the media knows it and the teachers know it. More credibility is lost by boards of education through "final" offers than through just about any other bargaining ploy.

- Don't try to obtain publicity by pressure. If a newspaper or radio or TV station is independent and objective – and most are – NO ONE, outside of its own corporate management,

and in some cases not even them, tells a news outlet what news to print or to broadcast. By trying to persuade someone with influence in your community to pressure the local news media into using your side of the negotiations or strike story, you are courting the very real possibility that you will be ignored, at best, or at worst, exposed for what you are trying.

- Above all, be honest, accurate, frank and friendly.

A few technical details will help, too:

√ Wherever the negotiations are held, try to provide at least one telephone for use by the media, even if, in a pinch, it is merely a phone on a nearby secretary's desk. A couple of private telephones would be ideal, but not absolutely necessary.

√ A typewriter or two would be handy. While, contrary to the movies, few newspaper reporters will write their stories on the spot, it helps the broadcast media to have a typewriter on which to compose 30-second or 60-second feeds to their stations.

√ Provide all media representatives with names and telephone numbers – including home telephones – of key contact persons – spokesperson, chief negotiator, superintendent, school board president. But emphasize to the media that there is only one spokesperson.

√ Compile a list of telephone numbers yourself – office and home – of media people covering the negotiations. You'll never know when you'll need to call them.

√ Be aware of deadlines. A news conference at 3 p.m. is an anathema to an afternoon newspaper. Most morning newspaper people don't come to work until about 10 a.m. Neither do night TV news crews. News conferences after 4 p.m. will be sparsely attended unless you're going to announce a settlement or a strike. Chances are anything announced after 9 p.m. won't make the next morning's paper unless it's a major happening. The very best time for releasing news – for all concerned – is between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. Next best: early afternoon.

Communicating with Parents and the Community

While the news media, in most cases, will be the quickest way to reach parents and the community during negotiations, it can not and must not be considered the only way.

For one thing, the media, by its nature, can use just a capsule of your negotiations position in its daily or weekly reports. Some specific points you might consider crucially important to parents and the community might be considered by the media not as newsworthy as some of the more immediate financial or political aspects of the negotiations process. Thus it may never see print or be presented on the air.

The answer, then, for parents and community, is a series of fact sheets presenting management's step-by-step view of the negotiations process.

These fact sheets should be just that – FACT sheets – not propaganda leaflets geared to pull the wool over the collective eyes of the community. You may fool all of the people some of the time, but propaganda will boomerang in the long run.

The key with parents and the community, as with the news media, is to stick to the facts on the issues at hand. Leave out opinions about the employe organizations, however tempted you may be to editorialize about their behavior, their personal attacks, or any other diversion planned to take the spotlight off issues like salaries, class size, length of the school day, extracurricular pay, preparation time and health and welfare benefits.

The public does not care what the school district's chief spokesperson thinks about the family background of the union's chief negotiator. They don't expect you to embrace him or her with open arms. But they do expect to be informed honestly and objectively about the issues that could lead to a strike.

Experience has shown that parents and community want the following kinds of information:

- √ What are the issues, and what is their financial impact on the pocketbook of the parent/taxpayer?

- √ What about the union's charge that by opposing their requests you're diminishing the quality of education offered to youngsters in the school district? If the board has its way in negotiations, how would the contract affect the quality of education?

- √ If there is a strike, will the schools be open? Will there be transportation and lunches? Will the children be safe? Might school buildings be closed at midday during a strike, sending children of working parents out on the street with no adult supervision?

- √ Who or where can a parent call to get up-to-the-minute information about the imminence of a strike?

- √ Can parents help out in the schools if there is a strike?

All right, but how do you get this information to parents?

It's a good question, and the first answer is how not to do it. And the one process that should be avoided is sending letters home with students. In essence, you're using the students against their teachers and the repercussions will be considerable.

It's like waving a red flag in the teacher association's face, inviting open resistance on the part of the classroom teacher and a confrontation you don't need any part of, particularly during what more than likely is a delicate time in the negotiations process.

The answer is the mails. Small school districts should have a list ready beforehand of every mailing address in the community, or at least of every household with children in the schools. A full set of mailing labels can be prepared ahead of time.

Larger school districts must have lists of all key communicators in the community: PTA officers, civic and community groups, block associations, community service groups, businessmen, bankers, politicians – and don't forget the "butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker" – just about anyone with an interest in the community and its schools.

When negotiations are at an impasse; when the teachers' association has gone public; whenever the board of education decides to take its case to the community: all these contacts must be fully informed by fact sheets that are, in fact, factual.

Communicating with the Staff

When a strike is imminent, perhaps your most important communication must go to staff: to the staff directly affected by the strike as well as to the rest of the school district employes. They, above all, must know, concisely and clearly, the administration's position on the issues in contention.

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Such a communiqué is imperative not only to clarify the administration's position on the issues, but to dispel whatever misinformation has been circulated about the conflict between union and management.

Kenneth K. Muir, director of the department of information for the Montgomery County (Md.) Public Schools, says:

> Every argument has two sides, and a major problem in a strike threat is to try to make employes aware of the board's position. A union will get its case to the members quickly. The members will be relatively uncritical about the union position because, after all, the union will be 'fighting for their rights.' But unions have been known to oversimplify, misrepresent, omit certain points and sometimes tell outright lies to their members.

Yet, before management sits down to compose a message to its employes, it should have no delusions that the communique will prevent a strike by causing employes to rise up against their association leaders. Cases where this has happened are few and far between. Even if the majority of employes may not agree with their association's position on certain matters, they almost always will go along with that position as a show of strength in hopes of getting a better contract in the end.

Many a board of education has composed a glowing letter to its employes explaining how unjust the demands of the union leaders are, only to have the letter virtually ignored by employes taking part in a strike authorization vote.

Yet it is still important, in the long run, that every school district employe be fully and accurately informed of the positions separating management and the union.

The primary problem of composing such a letter, however, will be how to communicate with an audience that may, to a considerable degree, already have its mind made up, and will, to a great degree, be distrustful of anything management has to say.

Celia Pincus, long-time president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, used to contend that if you dropped a bomb on the school administration building in Philadelphia, three things would happen: no one would notice anything missing, you'd save a lot of money and the schools would run a lot better. When she'd say it, everyone would chuckle at such a cute fantasy.

Yet, when former Philadelphia superintendent Mark Shedd made it mandatory for central office administrators to get out into the schools and serve five-week stints as principals during

out-of-town inservice training for regular principals, they began to realize that it wasn't a fantasy after all. A great many of the teachers out in the field actually felt that way. And that was during a period of peace between the administration and the union.

So when strike time comes, you can be certain that the board's communiqué to teachers will be suspect at best, and more than likely viewed as outright propaganda from the "bad guys" trying to take bread off the teachers' tables.

Thus, the following guidelines should be followed:

- If you're thinking about threats and coercion, forget it. To be effective at all, the content must be absolutely factual, low-key and nonthreatening. Don't threaten to fire anyone who strikes unless you mean to carry through. Threats like these have been made since teacher strikes began, but rarely have they been carried out. What they usually do is solidify the members behind the union leaders and make the rest of your communiqué meaningless.

- Don't use editorials. A strike may be illegal. If it is, say so. But don't call it "unconscionable," "demagogic," "ruthless," "power mad," "immoral," "scurrilous," or any other dollar-and-a-half words you can think of. Words like these rarely have any impact on employes fighting for their contractual lives, except perhaps to make them chuckle a little. If there is a state law prohibiting school employe strikes, cite it chapter and verse, but don't add your own subjective observations to it.

- If you have rejected certain union demands that now form the principle strike issues, explain why. Employes may be getting an entirely different story from their leaders. But don't bother to denounce union demands for a telephone in every lavatory. Everyone knows demands like this are made initially as grist for the bargaining mill. You're wasting your time remonstrating about them.

- If you have a problem with the association and its leaders, don't tar all teachers with the same brush. In the emotions of negotiating on the brink of a strike, things can get nasty on either side, but to castigate "teachers" in general for the actions of one or two union officials is to solidify, again, the

members behind their leaders. If you feel it's necessary to "get tough" in your communiqué to staff, be careful to differentiate between the negotiators and the rest of the employes sitting home hoping and praying there won't be a strike.

- Enumerate concessions management has already made. Many times these are considerable, yet they get lost in the glare of the issues that are still unresolved.

- Detail your "last" offer to the teachers' association (remember there is no such thing as a "final" offer) and why, particularly financially, you feel you shouldn't go any further. Employes are taxpayers, too, and away from the heat of the negotiating table they can look objectively at the financial impact an inflated settlement would have on the community.

- Remember to send the communiqué to all staff members, not just the employe group threatening to strike. Other employe groups may make up their minds whether or not to cross picket lines from how you outline your position on the issues at impasse. You might include a cover letter, too, letting the other employes know, in a nonthreatening and matter-of-fact way, that they are expected to work in accordance with their contracts and with the policies of the school district if there is a strike.

- Remember, too, that there is a fine line between being argumentative and setting the record straight. Stay on the straight side even if it pains you to do so. The reader's reaction will depend largely on the tone of the communication. As Muir says: "It doesn't pay to berate the honesty of the union leadership, complain about the unrealistic nature of their demands, or question their good faith in bargaining. The effect of those tactics will be just the opposite of what is desired."

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Drawing Up a Communication Plan

So someone turns to you and says, "all right, draw up a communications plan." What do you do? Where do you start? What is a communications plan, anyway? These questions and more come up, and they can be answered, in turn, by asking yourself some questions.

It may sound complicated, but it isn't. If you are put in charge of drawing up a communications plan for a strike or other school emergency, or as part of the district's overall management plan, just ask yourself the following:

1. Why do I need to communicate, anyway? Why set up a communications plan in the first place?

2. Who must I communicate with? Who needs to know?

3. What do I want to tell people? What, exactly, do I want to communicate to them?

4. How do I gather the information I want to communicate?

5. Once I get the information, how do I actually communicate it? What methods of communication would be best in this situation?

And some of the answers you might come up with are as follows:

1. Because the emergency most likely will have a wide-

spread effect on the operation of the schools, the safety and welfare of the pupils, the actions of school employes and the critical support of community services such as police and transportation. Without adequate communication it will be difficult, if not impossible, to deal with the many facets of any school emergency.

2. Plenty of people need to know: staff, parents, key community communicators, students, civic leaders, politicians, the chamber of commerce, the media, strikers, non-strikers, the police department, the local transit company and perhaps, in various situations, others not listed here.

3. You must communicate the full details of the emergency: school conditions, who's in, who isn't, the issue or issues causing the emergency, the position of the board of education, finances, the outlook for settlement, what you're going to do about operating a viable educational program in the meantime, the availability of lunch service, transportation schedules and more.

4. You gather the information from the superintendent, the board, the principals, the negotiators and your key community communicators. (See p. 31.)

5. You communicate through the media, community meetings, staff meetings, a telephone hot line, regular telephones, letters, printed statements, flyers and any other device you can think of.

Chapter 2

During the Strike

The key to effective communication during a strike is advance planning. And that doesn't mean planning a day or two, or even a week or two, ahead of time.

It means that the day you begin negotiations you must face the possibility that there may be a strike. And that's the time to begin to plan a comprehensive communications network to be used if a strike occurs.

Says AASA:

> Such advance work in the development of a strike plan will pay big dividends later. This is true primarily because the plan was not developed in the 'heat of passion' just prior to a strike, and the plan was checked and double-checked for miscalculations and oversights.

Also, AASA counsels, advance planning gives the management team time to discuss the plan with others like the police department, the mayor, the city or town council or board of supervisors, and suppliers who must provide goods to the schools during a strike.

The Communications Center

A communications center must be at the heart of the plan: a place where strike and negotiations information can be gathered, analyzed and communicated in a systematic, professional and dispassionate way to the many publics affected by a strike.

There is nothing more important during a strike than good communication. Good, quick communication means good, quick

decisions. Communication provides the mechanism to keep things together during the emergency. Poor communication means indecision, confusion, possibly chaos and certainly a diminished position of the school board and administration in the eyes of the media, the community and the teachers, too.

The communications center should be in the administration building, near the superintendent's office. It should be staffed with a bank of telephones – depending, of course, on the size of the school district and its communication needs – to enable communication with schools, media, police, parents and other interested parties.

There should also be a log book for recording all incoming and outgoing telephone calls as well as strike incidents, since this information can be invaluable during a court injunction hearing.

And a large chalkboard helps, too, so that authorized persons coming in and out of the room can read up-to-the-minute status reports without bothering the people on the telephones.

Staff should include the superintendent, or a designated deputy, an information officer, a communications center manager to run the room operationally and keep the log, and a central office administrator whose job it is to deal directly with the schools in the field. During certain times, as when an injunction is being contemplated, it is also advisable to have an attorney present and to be aware of what's happening out on the picket lines.

It is in the communications center that the critical management decisions – except those requiring board action – will be made during a strike emergency.

First on the agenda each day should be reports from every school in the system – whether there are 3 or 300 – on its teacher and pupil attendance and on any incidents in or around the school.

This is a critical factor for public credibility. As Muir puts it:

> In the event of a strike, it is essential for the superintendent and his or her staff to have prompt and accurate information about the situation at all schools. In addition to news of crisis situations, the superintendent must have data on staff and pupil attendance and the availability of services in each school. This information is vital not only for management decisions, but because the news media and the parents will want to know, too.

Perhaps the most critical figure the community wants to know is how many teachers and pupils are in the schools. And it is

almost inevitable that the union's figures and the administration's figures will greatly differ. A fact sheet should be available showing the average number of students attending every school on an average (pre-strike) day.

That is why it's important to open the communications center to the media during the attendance-gathering process each morning – and, for that matter, at any time when confidential policy or the status of negotiations are not being discussed.

Unfortunately, in many school districts the media and the administrators mix like oil and water. The fact remains that if the teachers' association can convince the media, and through them the public, that attendance figures are suspect, credibility will suffer greatly.

Thus, if the reporters are on hand to watch the figures being gathered – school-by-school – from the field, they can accurately and confidently report them without being swayed by union contentions that the figures are inflated by the administration.

Of course, if you are inflating the figures, or even padding them to include emergency support personnel as full-time teachers, you run the risk of being in double trouble.

Ned Hopkins, former New York State Education Assn. assistant executive secretary, relates one of his experiences in Los Angeles this way:

> The first day of the strike, we [the teachers association] claimed that there was something like 60% of the teachers out. And we admitted that was a projection based on a sampling of about 10% of the schools in the district.
>
> The district claimed 30% of the teachers were out. The newsmen knew that there had to be some reason for that huge disparity. We assured them that our projection was as honest as any projection could be. And because I had developed a good relationship with the media, simply from being at the bargaining table and giving them accurate information for a long period of time, the Los Angeles *Times* dug into the district's claim and found that they had been adding all of the substitutes and everybody else who were filling in for teachers who were on strike.
>
> When that was published on the front page of the *Times*, it was like the end of the ballgame for the district's credibility for a considerably long time during the strike.

The advantages, then, of a good communications command post and an open door to the media are many. They include:

- Instant communication with the media.
- Instant verification of information and squelching of rumor.
- Updated, validated information for board members and top staff in decision-making positions.
- On-the-spot cooperation from the police department in preventing what could become serious picket line confrontations.
- A morale-boosting mechanism through which management realizes that no problem is too big or too complex to handle, and that competent communications makes it possible for the board and the administration to endure whatever obstacles the strike has to offer.

A Telephone Hot Line

The prime method for answering strike inquiries from the public is through a telephone "hot line."

The local telephone company can set up a system whereby an answering device, with a message recorded and constantly updated by a management spokesperson, is able to answer 20 or more calls at the same time, 24 hours a day. This type of system is a must. Nothing makes the public angrier than to call an advertised hot line number and have it busy all the time. Ditto for the many striking employes who will be calling, too, to find out what's going on if their association headquarters doesn't have a hot line setup.

Systems like these will take up to a minute and a half or two minutes of recording and are relatively inexpensive when you consider their communication impact on the community.

However, there is a less expensive alternative: a hot line system staffed by volunteer parents sitting around a table with a bank of telephones and answering calls from the community in person. This involvement is a real communication "plus," especially for a small district because these parents know and relate to the schools' publics.

Montgomery County, Md., schools information director Ken Muir recommends a staff of eight parents working under the supervision of the district's information staff. He suggests the use of two shifts of volunteers working five hours each, providing service from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., with possibly another five-hour shift extending the service to 10 p.m. A single telephone number can be advertised, with calls to that number automatically "hunting" through the busy lines and finding an open telephone.

Muir suggests that in this type of setup an information staff person should be on hot line duty at all times, monitoring information the volunteers are giving out, as well as handling tough questions and explanations that are beyond the expertise of the volunteers. A fact sheet with answers to most questions helps.

He warns, however, that in an orientation session it must be stressed that volunteers should not take sides with callers for or against the strike. "The volunteer should provide only factual information," he says, and if the caller persists in complaining about management's position – as some will – "they should be encouraged to write a letter. Or the volunteer may say that the complaint 'has been noted and will be passed on to the superintendent'."

Other Lines of Communication

When a strike is imminent, it's natural to begin planning for major communication efforts with the media, staff and community. But in the process some problems with the mechanisms of communication can easily be overlooked.

Regular channels of communication may very well be disrupted, causing a frantic search for alternatives. For instance:

- The interschool mail truck drivers may be out on strike or unwilling to cross picket lines. Management itself may have to deliver the printed word.

- The print shop staff may be out, too, meaning a search for an outside printer; who may, in turn, have a union shop unwilling to handle the business. It may be back to the stencils.

- Administration building telephone operators may also be out, severely curtailing telephone operations, except for direct

The Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick Maker: Identifying 'Key' Communicators

Identifying and working with those persons in the community who have widespread contact with the residents can be a real PR-plus for the school district. More information and misinformation about school policies, programs and problems is transmitted by word of mouth than by any other means. The school district that is able to identify and work with those in the community who are such key transmitters helps to insure the accuracy of the information exchanged.

Channeling information about the school district to and through the community is the role of the key communicator. They can identify and explain the sparks of small problems before they become a fire. They can offer reactions to school district plans before they are offered to the whole community.

But many of the community's key communicators are not the traditionally identified ones like the Rotary Club president, the City Council member or the PTA president. Just as often they are the barber, the beautician, the mailman or the gas station operator – persons with whom many community members have regular and frequent contact.

Once you've identified your key communicators, a series of get-acquainted meetings and regular orientation sessions, the development of a hot line system to inform them on key issues and the establishment of a regular system of communication should help to ensure your district of a personal pipeline which will curb rumors as well as maintain a steady flow of information about the schools to the community's residents.

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lines into the communication center. Somebody in management better learn how to use the switchboard. (This is a good year-round idea in case of storms and other crisis situations.)

Each of these possible communication disruptions should be considered carefully, and plans should be made for adequate alternative service.

Spokespersons During a Strike

Up until the strike, management's spokesperson has dealt almost exclusively with issues at the bargaining table. But during a strike there is a dual demand for information if the schools are kept open. One is for continued status reports on negotiations. The other is for status reports on conditions in the schools.

Thus it is the recommendation here that during a strike there should be two management spokespersons: one – preferably the chief negotiator – commenting on the negotiations, and the other – preferably the communications specialist – commenting on operational matters.

Both usually are well-trained in their professions and are capable of stating management's positions as well as taking the flak that goes with it.

The Role of the Superintendent

The superintendent is the key person to glue everything back together after the strike and as such should refrain from being drawn into the inevitable emotional charges and countercharges that surround a strike situation.

That's not to say that the superintendent should be a benign bystander during a strike. Far from it. He or she should be playing several key communication roles during the emergency. They are:

√ Holding off-the-record, background briefing sessions as requested by the media and the community's key communicators, both on the educational program being offered in the schools and the issues still at impasse across the bargaining table.

Board Members Aware

Ann Barkelew, public information officer for the Los Angeles County Schools, has her own list of "musts" for board members for communicating during a strike. Among them are:

- Be sure you understand the negotiations process – completely.
- Be sure your budget information is well known in the community. Don't keep it secret and then expect the public to understand your financial problems at strike time.
- Realize that once a strike starts, it is an organizational stand. You will not be dealing with the local teachers' association you have known and are familiar with. State and national association "pros" in the art of conducting a strike will be there – and they'll be in charge.
- Stay cohesive and present a unified stand.
- Maintain contact with your constituents, with your legislators, with civic leaders. Let them know you are in charge and in control.
- Express confidence in the leadership and abilities of your administrators in all your contacts with the public.
- Have a district spokesperson who has great credibility in your community. If you are to be that official spokesperson, be sure you know everything there is to know about the situation. Be willing to devote lots of time to being involved.
- Don't react. Stay on the offensive. Don't allow any inclinations to "fire back and expose their tactics" to take over.
- Visit schools and classrooms. Know what's going on.
- Correct bad information calmly and rationally.
- Have all the facts; the number of students and teachers in school, the status of negotiations, the issues, etc.
- Keep in touch with the superintendent; drop by or telephone. Don't just sit back and wait to be communicated with.
- Be prepared for harrassment, in the form of phone calls, letters, negative stories in community newsletters, pickets at your home and your business, veiled and obvious threats.
- Remember that no one wins a strike – ever!
- Be ready to regard the strike and events during the strike as "water over the dam" once it ends. Your job then is to bring the district back together and move ahead.

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- √ Conferring daily with the school board or a board committee on policy matters in the schools and on negotiations.
- √ Making management decisions – based on communications input from the field – on the day-to-day operation of the schools.
- √ Planning – constantly planning – to bring the system together again after the strike.

As a matter of fact, the teachers' association will know full well what the superintendent is up to during a strike, even if he/she doesn't make public statements. And any sign of management weakness on the part of the superintendent during the strike may very well be exploited by the union afterwards.

The Role of the School Board

One of the most frustrated parties in a strike or negotiations dispute is the board of education. Members of the board invariably are the targets of teachers who want more, the taxpayers who want to give the teachers less and parents who don't care if it's more or less as long as it opens the schools.

AASA reports:

> Individual members of the board of education will be under great stress during a work stoppage. This may include threatening telephone calls, picketing of the board member's home, harassment (including spouse and family members) and personal pressure from strike sympathizers or the general citizenry who may not agree with the board's position.

As a result, more often than not a board member may fire off a volley into the communication warfare, usually prolonging the agony over the bargaining table and the anguish in the community.

Columbus (Ohio) attorney and school board negotiations representative Robert Baker puts it this way:

> I know one of the most difficult problems I have as a board representative, and I have never represented any teachers in negotiations, is to try to keep the lid on the board of education . . . to keep the board of education from blasting off in the press. This happens inevitably.

Berkeley's former board president Louise Stoll sees it just about the same way. She contends:

> Little public sympathy or communication is obtained if the anger of the board member is aroused to the point where hostile language is used and emotional reactions are visible to the public.
>
> While teacher leaders are expected, in the opinion of the community, to respond emotionally, board members do not have that privilege. Accordingly, every effort must be made by the board member to hold his cool during public sessions and to respond to criticism and complaints, even irrational ones, in a respectful manner.

But a hostile response to hostility is not the only public communication problem faced by board members during strikes and negotiations, according to Stoll. Another is the desire of board members with minority opinions on strike issues to make those opinions known. She explains:

> One of the most difficult problems faced in the negotiating process is the internal disagreement which may exist among board members regarding positions taken at the bargaining table. The presentation of these conflicting positions publicly in board meetings and to the press creates a situation which almost always works to the advantage of the employe leadership.
>
> The words of a board member opposing the majority board position will be thrown up to the board's representative in negotiations. In addition, board members who let minority views be known are certain to be subjected to private efforts by employe organizations to split from the board publicly.

Thus, she counsels, all major debate concerning the board's decision should take place in executive session. At public meetings, the board must act "as a unit," she says, when responding to questions concerning the negotiating process and the positions taken by the board's negotiator.

Other suggestions by Stoll on communicating during a strike are:

- Board members must find ways to maintain visibility within the community, give assurances that they are informed

concerning the negotiations process, and that they will not be forced into making decisions not in the best interests of the constituency they represent. This can only be done if board members are, in fact, well aware of what is taking place at the bargaining table and have a plan for promulgating their position in the community through regular reports at board meetings, mailings to citizens, press conferences and releases.

- It is important that no matter how well informed and decisive board members are, they not commit themselves publicly to any position with such firmness that compromise, which might be demanded later in the bargaining process, becomes impossible.

- Board members should know – and never forget – that while it is very easy for a teacher organization to put together a telephone tree so a board member receives numerous calls expressing support for a teacher organization demand, this telephone tree might not reflect the sentiments of the community. It is also very easy for a teacher organization to create a letter-writing campaign within the community, which, because it is unopposed, appears persuasive.

- Board members have the advantage of regularly scheduled public meetings. These provide an excellent forum for expressing opinions and reinforcing positions taken during negotiations or on issues relating to a strike.

Don't Neglect the Radio

If you're busy catering primarily to print media coverage, you're overlooking your number one daytime communications media, according to Ann Barkelew, public information officer for the Los Angeles County Schools. And that media is the radio. According to Barkelew, a survey in Los Angeles County has shown that during the early morning hours 70% of the community relies on the radio for its news, compared with 21% relying on newspapers and 9% relying on television. In the late morning hours it's 69% radio, 16% television and 15% newspapers. From noon to 6 p.m., the figures are 46% radio, 28% TV and 26% newspapers. From 6 p.m. to midnight, it switches to 72% TV, 15% radio and 13% newspapers.

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- The district must have a professional communications specialist, its own or a hired one, so the refined media techniques which the teacher organizations use are matched. Teacher organizations will be supplying ready copy for the newspapers, and the district must ensure an equal flow of information. (If built on a 12-month plan of communications, the district will have a regular channel.)

The Role of the Principal

The principal, like the board member, is a person in the middle, but he or she is also on the day-to-day firing line out in the schools. The superintendent and the board are ordering that schools be kept open and the union wants them closed down. Teachers on the picket line and teachers crossing it are trading insults, at best. Sometimes there's violence. Parents are concerned. Teachers are angry. Children are confused. There's an educational program to be run. And in his or her spare time, the principal has to find time to communicate, too.

Where to start?

The answer to that one, like so many other answers involved in a strike, is advance planning.

First of all, the principal should be involved in planning, long before any strike, what the game plan is in the event of a strike. The principal should be presented with a detailed strike plan, covering operations and communications in every conceivable situation.

These will be the principal's guidelines as he or she goes about the hazardous job of keeping a school open during a strike.

The principal must also keep in close touch with the management team's position on negotiations, through staff briefings and flyers, through the telephone hot line and through the news media. The principal is a part of the management team, and among the obligations will be to explain management's position at the building level – to teachers and other school personnel; to parents and community leaders and, in secondary schools, to the students.

Says AASA:

The principal is the key figure in the dissemination of information to the staff and parents. Through daily contact with both groups, he or she is in the best position to relay, with accuracy, the administration and board position.

Building principals must be provided with accurate and timely progress reports on a daily basis. It is just plain foolhardy to put the building principal in the position of having to say, 'I don't know' or 'No one has told me very much.'

AASA warns, however, that while principals should be the prime middle management spokespersons for the board and administration position, "they should also be cautioned not to engage in heated debates or to allow emotionally charged outbursts to polarize faculties."

But besides informing the community of management's position on a strike, the principal can also serve as a community barometer for the board and the superintendent, assessing community reaction to the board's position and to the union's demands and channeling this reaction back to the administration.

Terrance Hatch, writing in the *NAESP Bulletin*, suggests the following cautions concerning a principal's communications during a strike:

√ Leave the bargaining at the bargaining table.

√ Do not express antagonistic views around the staff.

√ Avoid making public pronouncements about your point of view on the issues.

√ Avoid confronting and talking with pickets.

Educational Research Service, Arlington, Va., suggests a long series of guidelines for principals dealing with a strike in its report, "Contingency Planning for Teacher Strikes." Among them are:

- Clarify the district's policy in regard to a strike.
- Recommend closing of the school only when the health or safety of students or staff is in danger or when a meaningful educational program is impossible.
- Plan statements which may be needed for news media serving the school's attendance area.
- Establish communication between the school and local community support groups.

- Conduct daily faculty meetings to review progress and problems and facilitate better communication among those coming to work.

- Document strike activities and report them to the district's communications center.

- Report attendance of students and staff to the communications center. (Be sure to include an average "pre-strike" day figure, then the "strike" day figure since all children are never in school on a given day.)

- Make sure lines of communication are open to parents, particularly to the PTA or home and school association.

- Find out the district's policy on distribution of literature by striking teachers.

- Establish an effective, alternative means of communicating with staff and students if the usual methods of typed messages and the PA system are not available during a strike.

- Make sure the staff is aware that only the principal is authorized to make public statements relative to conditions at the school during a strike.

Two communication suggestions for principals dealing with parents are made in "Teacher Strike: A Guide for Administrators," published by the Ohio Assn. of Elementary School Principals, the Ohio Assn. of Secondary School Principals and the Ohio Council of Administrative Personnel Assns. They are:

1. Whatever is said to parents must be prudent so that good rapport between parents and school officials is maintained. A clear explanation of the facts is important. Detailed questions must be referred to the proper source.

2. Inform parents of the possibility that students may have to be sent home early if not enough staff shows up. There will be cases of parents working and the lack of a place for students to go if they are dismissed. And the problem is that much greater at the elementary level.

But how does a principal get all this negotiations knowledge to enable him to be everything to everyone at the middle management level?

A system to do just that was developed by the Wilmington (Del.) schools during an eight-week strike in the fall of 1975. As described by John T. Holton, the school district's public information officer, this is how it worked:

√ During negotiations, the superintendent met monthly with all principals to give them an overview of administration strategy and a report on the progress in negotiations. In the last month of the contract, these meetings were held weekly.

√ Regular meetings were also held with principals during the work stoppage to get feedback on conditions in schools and to update them on any change in the status of negotiations.

√ An elementary principal and a secondary principal sat on the negotiating team, keeping their peers abreast of the developments.

√ A "fan out" telephone system was developed to get information to all principals day or night, if necessary.

√ All press releases, position papers and board statements were issued to principals either prior to or simultaneously with public issue.

Communicating with Students

Another public that must be communicated with during a strike, particularly at the secondary level, is the student body.

As the Ohio administrators' publication points out: "A channel of communication with the students is the only way to insure cooperation if the students are in the building. They will have many questions which must be answered quickly and properly. It is the responsibility of the principal to communicate with the students."

But in communicating with the students, the publication advises, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Communication with the student should begin at once, as soon as the strike occurs.

- Efforts should be made to avoid "using" the students either for or against the teacher action.

- It is very important to maintain a "sober" attitude in the eyes of the students. The strike is not a "lark" and students must be impressed by the seriousness of the situation.

AASA advocates informing secondary school students beforehand that a strike is possible. But above all, AASA says, "there should be no emotional appeals, no threats of 'great educational damage' and no negativism."

The organization suggests that "the message might simply state that a work stoppage is a possibility and if this should occur, every attempt to maintain the educational program will be effected."

It would be "naive" to assume that a possible teacher work stoppage would not be "the main topic of discussion on the high school campus," AASA says, and thus a formal notification to students would "serve many purposes," such as:

- It informs the students officially;

- It says, in effect, that students are directly affected and the administration is aware of it.

Communicating with the Media

Coverage of pre-strike negotiations is almost casual compared with the urgency the media attaches to reporting negotiations amid the community uproar of a strike.

Whereas before the strike a daily telephone call to the chief negotiator or the chief spokesman more than likely would suffice for an update on any progress or the lack of it, once you get down to the 11th hour and then into the nitty-gritty of a strike, you'll have the media just outside the negotiations room door for the duration, sometimes around the clock.

They'll want to know anything and everything. And the side that makes it easier for them to do their jobs will reap the benefits of full and objective reporting. Some suggestions:

▲ Brief the media fully on every point that is at issue across the bargaining table, including statistics, philosophy, reasons for your positions on the issues and the school district's total financial situation. Give the media copies of the exhibits you have

introduced at the table, including wage and class size comparisons with other similar school districts. Let them know everything that isn't strictly confidential at the moment. That way, if the teachers' association should try to misrepresent your position in their briefing of reporters, the reporters will know better. On the other hand, if you remain secretive, the reporters will have only the association charges to go by, and they'll print them.

▲ Invite the media into your caucuses from time to time. Have them get to know the entire negotiating team personally. Answer their questions about new positions or issues. Relax and be informal and they'll relax and be informal, too.

▲ Have an information specialist available at all times to serve the media while the negotiating team is negotiating. The information specialist should be as up-to-date on the issues as the members of the negotiating team themselves.

▲ Telephones again are a must for the media. And coffee, a typewriter or two and a comfortable place to sit during the long waits between breaks in the bargaining sessions are good ideas, if possible.

The important thing is to take the media into your confidences as much as possible without tipping bargaining strategies or other strictly confidential information. If you're dealing with a ton of paperwork, offer it to the reporters, too. The good ones will take it, read through it, and become just as informed as anyone else on the issues at hand. This will make for full and fair reporting.

Conversely, the more you keep the media in the dark as to your bargaining positions and your reasons for them, the more the reporters will go to the union for their information. And this means more union information, instead of yours, will find its way into print and onto the radio and TV.

That's not to say, however, that the bargaining sessions themselves should be opened to the media and the public. This is an increasing demand from a public growing more weary of the charges and countercharges that grow out of impasse as strikes throughout the nation increase in quantity and volume each year.

Expert negotiations opinion holds, however, that the negotiating in a fishbowl actually detracts from the bargaining process by shifting the emphasis across the table and trying to prove who is right and who is wrong, instead of trying to settle the strike.

It has worked in some cases. In San Francisco, negotiations

once were undertaken on public television and a settlement resulted. Conversely, negotiations during a heated strike in Philadelphia went on TV in 1973 and the result was disastrous. Not only was nothing accomplished, but the public was infuriated at the sight of grown people firing prepared statements, insults and statistics back and forth for four hours while 270,000 pupils spent their sixth consecutive week out of school.

Some, however, contend that public negotiations, perhaps without live TV, could still work. One of them is Berkeley's Louise Stoll. "Public negotiation calls a bluff in regard to misrepresentation in a direct and effective way," she contends, adding that "if employe organizations refuse to participate, they lose credibility in the community." And if they appear, she says, "a skilled spokesman can effectively demonstrate to the public the reasonableness and truthfulness of the board's position."

John Marrs, public affairs officer for the Lansing (Mich.) schools, takes the opposite view. "I legitimately don't think you can negotiate in public," he says, "because it's really just posturing: each side trying to get itself in the most favorable public posture."

Marrs relates a case in Massachusetts where the school board insisted that the negotiations be held in a high school auditorium to try to show up the teacher association.

When the appointed time came, with both sides facing each other across a big stage, there were 1,000 people in the auditorium as well as the press, radio and TV. The school board chairman pounded his gavel, according to Marrs, and said: "This negotiation session will come to order."

The teacher association negotiator, realizing that little could be accomplished in the circus atmosphere, stood up, as the cameras reeled away and 1,000 people strained forward to hear every word, and said: "Mr. President, we have only one demand to negotiate tonight, and that is finally getting rid of the rats in the cafeteria." The place broke up.

The board president rose, according to Marrs, pounded his gavel, and said: "This negotiation session is concluded."

Now, probably not all public negotiations would turn out as badly as that, or as badly as they did in Philadelphia. But on the other hand, rarely would they have the success they did in San Francisco.

So the advice from the pros, at least up to the time this handbook is being written, is stick to the standard, private, collective give-and-take over the bargaining table.

Chapter 3

Communication in Action: The Philadelphia Story

The following chapter is based on the author's personal recollections and assessment of the Philadelphia school strike in 1973. J. William Jones was and still is the district's public information officer and as such was a key figure in the development and implementation of the district's communication plan during the crisis. Although the Philadelphia school system is obviously a large and sophisticated one with a sizable communication department staff, small and medium size districts, as indicated in the previous chapter, can adapt the methods and procedures to meet their individual needs based both on resources and the size of the public to be served.

How It Began

As the sun slowly rose over a frosty Philadelphia on January 8, 1973, it found thousands of shivering teachers picketing the city's public schools – the beginning of a strike that was to become one of the longest and most emotional in the history of the labor movement in education.

Although the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers had struck for 17 days in September 1972, they returned to the classrooms while negotiations continued. No one dreamed in January that it would take the personal intervention of the President of the United States to help bring an end to the confrontation – 38 hectic school days later, on March 1, 1973.

In the meantime there would be picket line confrontations, hundreds of teachers arrested, an injunction, the jailing of the union's president and chief negotiator, negotiations ending each afternoon so the union officials could return to the city prison, fines in the hundreds of thousands of dollars (which later were voided by the State Supreme Court), courtroom drama, an emotional four-hour confrontation on live TV, the barricading of the school administration building, a threatened citywide strike by 250,000 members of the AFL-CIO, and finally the intervention of George Meany, AFL-CIO president, President Richard Nixon, and Nixon's chief labor troubleshooter, William J. Ussery.

While all the advance planning in the world could not have prepared for a strike like that, the communication plans developed by a team of administrators held things together during times when it appeared as if the world were coming apart at the seams.

During the September strike, schools had been kept closed by the Board of Education, so the major activity then was in the negotiating room.

Who Needs To Know What

But on the morning of January 8, with the schools to be kept open to the greatest extent possible and the classrooms to be staffed by substitutes, volunteers, administrators and those teachers who crossed the picket lines, the following communication needs were thrust upon the school district:

- Parents of 280,000 pupils wanting to know, each day, if their children's school was open, and if so at what time. What about buses and lunch? Was there violence on the picket line? How many teachers were reporting for work?

- 280 principals having to make early morning decisions, with assistance from the central office, whether to open or close.

- Media coverage by three newspapers, three television stations, two national wire services and three national networks in both radio and TV, plus visiting reporters from various parts of the country.

- Civic and community groups demanding daily updates on what was going on. What about negotiations? Any progress? What are the main issues?

- The city police department needing information on picket line trouble, possible violence, threats, altercations and locations where extra police were needed.

- Central office administrators needing to know which schools were in need of what kind of staff.

- The local transportation company needing daily updates on how many students were attending school and at what times.

- Combatting the unbelievable number of rumors that were springing up throughout the city.

The answer was a total communications system using telephones and walkie-talkies in a communications center called the "situation control room," or, as the media dubbed it, the "war room."

Setting Up the Communication Center

THE STAFF: Superintendent and executive deputy superintendent; associate superintendent for school operations; chief of security; legal counsel; director of the Office of Informational Services; Philadelphia city policemen and various aides.

EQUIPMENT: Nine telephone lines (four unlisted numbers from a regular in-house emergency communications system; two administration building lines; two public lines; one intercom line directly to police headquarters) linking the administration building, district offices, schools and police headquarters; two walkie-talkies, one for communication with police vehicles, the other for communication with radio-controlled school board vehicles.

THE SCHEDULE:

6-9 a.m.: Take reports from the field on problems and picket line incidents as well as a general indication of staff strength coming into the various schools. Get early word of school closings and feed information to the media.

9 a.m.: Conference call to all eight district superintendents at the same time. District-by-district count of schools to be open

or closed. Discussion of staff and other problems. Orders for the day. Update on negotiations, legal proceedings, etc.

9-11 a.m.: Take care of various problems as they arise: schools being blocked; cutoff of fuel deliveries; reports of confrontation on the picket lines; schools closing for lack of staff; fill out log book on every report.

11 a.m.: Report from each district, listing exact staff size, pupil count, number of paraprofessionals and times of operation for all 280 schools. Totals added up by 12 noon and distributed to the media.

Noon-2 p.m.: Plan strategies for the following day; get word out to media, principals, building administrators, board of education and interested civic and community groups.

2-3 p.m.: Conference call with all eight district superintendents to discuss plans in detail for the following day, to be relayed to each school.

3-5 p.m.: Field after-school calls from principals, other field administrators. Talk over problems with police. Answer questions from the media. Make final plans for the following day.

5 p.m.: Close situation control room.

In addition, the board rented a telephone answering system from Bell Telephone at an undisclosed location outside the building by which constantly updated recorded messages on the status of school openings and negotiations could be fed to as many as 40 callers at the same time.

'Credibility' Is Essential

One of the most important aspects of this type of communications setup was establishing credibility. There had to be credibility behind the school district's reports on pupil attendance and the number of teachers coming to work. And, as is the case in most confrontations of this kind, the union was challenging the district's figures every day.

No Communication Strategy? Here's What Can Happen

The following is one superintendent's account of what can happen during negotiations and a strike if a district does not have a planned and operational communication strategy. Robert L. Chisholm, superintendent of the Clover Park School District No. 400, Lakewood Center, Wash., describes the value of communications during collective bargaining in a district of 14,500 students with 615 teachers:

> Clover Park School District No. 400 in southwestern Pierce County, Wash., suffered its first strike in September 1975, when the teachers' union, Clover Park Education Assn., voted to strike when negotiations deteriorated. The strike ended after 12 days as teachers returned to classrooms to open the 1975-76 term. The labor agreement was negotiated by a federal mediator, a superior court judge, a court-appointed master and ultimately by the two attorneys representing the school board and the teachers' union.
>
> Regretfully, the bulk of the communication and/or propaganda preceding, during and following the strike was by the union. In retrospect, this organization (which drew on specialists from Washington Education Assn.) ran a masterful campaign. The school district, from the outset, was placed in a defensive position. The district was the 'good guys wearing the white hats' and truthfully, 'they got the stuffin' kicked out of 'em.'
>
> The union utilized press releases, bulletins to members, paid advertising, a telephone hot line for updating and every other
> stance as the abused. The school district appeared to many to 'float' without preplanned action. The district was

always attempting to 'put out the brush fires' and to 'play catch-up.'

The saving point for the school district was that school directors did not deviate from their best and last wage offer. Strangely enough, this wage offer was made before the strike and the board stood firm throughout all negotiations. One opinion is that the board's general attitude and firm wage stance offset the smooth, professional union approach which the community ultimately judged as unreasonable.

In spite of the union's slick campaign, many in the community were alienated. Certainly, the district came in for its share of criticism. The end result was a divided community . . . wounds are not yet healed.

One action which came out of the strike was a positive decision by the school district to establish its first official public information office. This office drew on experienced personnel within the district. Two individuals are assigned to the superintendent's office and report directly to the superintendent's administrative assistant.

Personnel in the new public information office are 'feeling their way' and attempting to set up an office based on careful analysis of needs and sound planning. The district's actions each and every day of the year must be utilized as the base for understanding . . . both at the staff and community levels.

Opening lines of communication within the district appear to be the most difficult task at the moment; maintaining and expanding community contacts will be continued. The information office is my 'number one priority.'

Yet, the school district actually involved the media in taking reports from district offices on pupil and teacher attendance. It was not an unusual sight each morning to see a reporter taking figures over the telephone and putting them onto logs for each of the schools.

Thus, when the union challenged the figures as fictitious, the reporter could tell his editor that he was in on the whole process and had confidence in it. If the editor was still skeptical, he was invited to send a reporter to any school that was open to count for himself.

Similarly, when the union challenged the caliber of education taking place in the schools that were open, the media was invited to go to any school and see for themselves. Most did, and most came back with good features on what it's like to teach in the shadow of a picket line.

While the reporters were in and out of the communication center, some of them actually broadcast live from the room, describing what was going on and turning the telephone over to an administrator to answer questions from an on-the-air anchorman.

The media was also of invaluable assistance by broadcasting live each morning which schools would be open and which schools would be closed. Within minutes after the information reached the communications center, it was on the air. There was no quicker way possible to be in touch with hundreds of thousands of parents and pupils throughout the city.

Also, it was absolutely imperative to establish credibility in discussing the issues involved in negotiations.

The reporter can be **each** side's voice to the community. If you are not totally open and frank with him, it won't take him long to suspect that you're attempting to use him to present a slanted picture to the community. If reporters feel they are being used, they are very apt to push the slant the other way, some almost subconsciously, others in retribution for your dishonesty with them.

Thus, in Philadelphia, reporters were invited to sit in on caucuses of the management negotiating team. All their questions were answered. They were supplied with most of the data and exhibits that had crossed the bargaining table. The sessions were conducted in a relaxed, informal atmosphere, but on the record, with no punches pulled.

But the sessions weren't held to castigate the union. Answers were supplied without emotion or charges.

Once again, whenever the union leaders referred to the issues

the reporters were already well aware of them, and they reported them accurately and objectively.

At one point in the long and frustrating strike, the union leaders became so upset with what they considered one-sided reporting and editorializing on the part of the media – most editorials were highly critical of the union for its demands on wages, preparation time and length of the school day – that they took out their own full and half-page newspaper ads to tell their story to the public and to criticize the media for its reporting.

At another point, pickets physically barred TV crews from entering the school administration building because they accused the cameramen of being unfair in their coverage of the strike. The dispute was settled quickly, but it left a bad taste in the mouths of media personnel.

That's not to say the administration did everything right. One of its major mistakes was to agree to negotiate on live TV for four hours on a Sunday morning six weeks into the strike. By this time, nerves were worn to a frazzle; little negotiating progress had been made, if any, from day one; the negotiating teams were fed up with each other; the community was upset; the majority of the school system's 13,000 teachers had been six weeks without pay; half the students were still out of school; and the mayor had unloaded verbally on the teachers with both barrels. With all this sweetness and light, the negotiators decided to accept a local TV station's offer to settle things live on the tube.

It was like "High Noon." Both sides were armed with an arsenal of charts and graphs, charges and countercharges. And they fought it out nonstop from 9 A.M. to 1 in the afternoon. It was considered a draw by the media. Both sides had decisively lost.

From there on in, editorial writers, who had almost unanimously been supporting the board of education for its stand against the union demands, changed their stance to heavily criticizing the intransigence of both sides. Six weeks of carefully planned communication went down the tube in four hours.

The Turning Point

Yet, even in a negative way, that Sunday morning may have been the turning point. For one thing, it alerted the community that the strike could last forever. The union leaders had survived an injunction, jail and six weeks without pay. They weren't about to back down now. And neither, apparently, was the board.

Communications moved quickly. The Philadelphia AFL-CIO threatened to "close down the city" for a day with a sympathy strike and a parade of 250,000 to 500,000 workers. Someone appealed to national AFL-CIO head George Meany, who appealed to President Nixon, who instructed Ussery to step into the negotiations.

Enter the Arbitrator

Ussery arrived in the city less than a week before the threatened walkout. He came in the evening and called a news conference for the next morning at a downtown hotel.

Ussery, in a flamboyant 10-gallon hat, smoking a big cigar and kidding in a southern drawl about being dragged off the golf course in Florida, said he had been in touch with both sides, detected many areas of compromise, the situation really wasn't as bad as everyone thought, and predicted a settlement by noon of the day preceding the threatened citywide walkout.

The board of education, which had never even met the man much less been in contact with him about the issues, listened to radio reports of the news conference incredulously as they awaited their first meeting with Ussery.

When he arrived shortly thereafter at the school administration building to meet with the board, the first question was how in the world he could make such a statement after being in town only a few hours and not really knowing the issues at all.

"What the hell did you expect me to say," he said with a big grin, "that there wouldn't be a settlement?"

And he was right. He locked the negotiators in a room for four days, bargaining around the clock and sleeping in chairs, and precisely at noon on the day before the walkout, Ussery held another news conference and announced the settlement, with a four-year contract at that.

It was an experience that few associated with it will ever forget. And if it weren't for the carefully planned communications system that somehow tied all the pieces together during eight frenetic weeks, it would be hard to imagine how the school district could have survived.

Chapter 4

After a Strike: Putting It Back Together

Of all the problems associated with a strike, putting the pieces together again may be the biggest.

If the schools have been kept open during the strike, it undoubtedly will take all the King's horses and all the King's men, and more, to paste the pieces back together again.

On this point, just about everyone agrees.

Says AASA:

> Sooner or later the strike will end. A compromise will be reached; the striking employes will return to teaching and the business of educating pupils will resume. It is at this point that the most crucial task of picking up the pieces begins.
>
> All in all, it is safe to say that when the strike is over, the feelings – deep feelings engendered in people of dedication – are still rampant and preying on all efforts to put aside a difficult experience.

Thomas Shannon, deputy superintendent and counsel for the San Diego Schools, writes in the *Journal of Secondary Education:*

> A school employes' strike leaves ugly scars. It splits the school staff into 'strikers' and 'scabs,' alienates parents and other members of the public, loosens discipline among the pupils and forces the school board into an indefinite period of assuming an adversary posture to the school district employes over whom it has jurisdiction under law.
>
> If normal school operations are to be restored as quickly as possible, the district must 'smooth over' the welts and bumps

everyone has taken as the result of a strike and thus minimize the long-term disastrous effects a strike can have on the educational enterprise.

Says the Ohio School Boards Assn.:

> Regardless of the circumstances in any given situation, the period immediately following a strike is difficult for both sides. Retribution is often the most prevalent feeling, at least subconsciously, of board and administration toward employes, of employes toward employes, and of employes toward board and administration. In short, emotional 'scars' often permeate the entire organizational structure of the school and the community in which it exists.

So what do you do to make this reconstruction period as easy as possible on everyone?

First, you start planning for the end of the strike the day it begins. Every time the superintendent, or a board member, or a principal, resists the urge to get involved in the emotional give-and-take of a strike, he or she is laying the groundwork for restoring human relationships when the strike is over.

Second, a true spirit of reconciliation must be adopted and promulgated by the superintendent, the board and the entire administrative team.

Writing in *Anatomy of a Teacher Strike: Case History of Teacher Militancy and How a Board of Education Coped With It*, Christopher Vagts and Robert Stone put it this way:

> There must be no 'good-guys' or 'bad guys' after a strike – just people trying to put a school system together again. Anything that discriminates against a teacher or a nonstriker must be rooted out and destroyed. The best guarantee is a strongly worded no-discrimination clause in the final contract.

The Role of the Principal

Many believe that the principal plays the number one reconciliation role after the strike.

The California School Boards Assn. says that "the principal will be in the best position to bind up the district's wounds on a day-to-day basis," and that he or she should be encouraged to:

- Avoid discussing strike incidents.
- Avoid animosity to employes who were on a strike.
- Avoid favoritism to employes who did not strike.
- Avoid the labels of "striker" and "nonstriker."

Says AASA:

> Invariably, the first uneasy moves toward conciliation will surface on the building level, requiring encouragement and nourishment from principals and other administrators. Most frequently, principals have found a renewed interest in educational quality and the curricular elements to be a common ground for mutual discussion and action. The education of the district's children is the 'raison d'etre' of all groups.

In Wilmington, Del., according to public information officer John Holton, the school district kept the principals, like the superintendent, "off the front lines" of the strike as much as possible.

"We found," he says, "they were the key to bringing the system back together again after the strike was over." And, he adds, "principals who were ardent and vocal supporters of the board's position had more trouble than their less visible colleagues." All communications to employes during the strike came from the central office, Holton says, "to keep the heat off the principal."

Also, he says that "throughout the strike we made it clear to the public and employes alike that this was a board policy. Principals were cast in the role of maintaining the health and safety of students and staff and providing the best possible instructional program."

And good communication between principals and teachers is a year-round effort in Wilmington, Holton adds, as the school district conducts inservice sessions for principals "on interpreting and administering the contract effectively and fairly."

Immediately after the strike, Wilmington scheduled a series of workshops with principals "to develop strategies for bringing the schools back together and dealing with problems that could arise." Follow-up meetings were held "to evaluate and adjust these strategies."

Among the workshop solutions to post-strike problems (particularly dealing with the staff splits between those who struck and those who didn't) were the following:

- A general meeting for open discussion by concerned parties might be called.

- The union/board agreement on nonreprisals should be given to every employe.

- Principals should talk out individual problems with teachers, particularly those teachers who stayed out and teachers who crossed picket lines to come to work.

- Principals should discourage a "we-them" atmosphere and let it be known that retaliation won't be tolerated. They should orient teachers to the need for cooperation in the healing process.

- Principals should assume a positive attitude at all times, and they should be firm in letting teachers know what is expected of them in behavior after the strike. Getting back to work and getting the job done should be emphasized.

- While some meetings will be necessary, principals should avoid holding too many meetings. The number one priority of teachers must be getting back to their teaching assignments.

One more communication problem tackled quickly by the Wilmington schools was to make sure a copy of the agreement with the teachers' union was in the hands of principals and other administrators as quickly as possible.

And that, says AASA, might be the most important post-strike communication need of all. It states:

> Probably one of the most important items in ending a strike is a thorough understanding by all administrators, particularly those in the buildings, of the terms of the settlement and its applications, including whatever administrative rules and regulations may accompany it.
>
> The chief negotiator (or certainly someone who understands completely the terms of the settlement – not only the words but the nuances and the spirit) should hold a thorough briefing for all administrators in the district prior to teacher return so they will have a first-hand understanding of the agreement.

AASA adds that "the unfortunate history of post-strike activities in many districts reveals an avalanche of grievances and arbitrations," and "the more bitter the feelings during any strike, the longer seems to be the grievance list in the following years."

One of the major causes of such arbitration and grievance, AASA contends, is "the building administrator's unawareness of the meaning of contract changes," which "can well lead to interpretations which may require the grievance and arbitration procedure to clarify.

"Thus does the superintendent need to plan many briefing sessions for all administrators responsible for carrying out the contract," says AASA, adding that "since new terminology sometimes influences the implications of old contract language, it is most important that all administrators understand not only the old contract but the changes which have been made, with all their ramifications.

"Information and understanding is the key," says AASA, to a smooth transition from the old contract to the new, and with it the burying of the animosities of a strike.

The Ohio School Boards Assn., in its publication, "Strike! A Planning Manual for Ohio School Boards," also sees the building level administrator as a key to restoring peace after the strike. The association says principals must deal directly with the "great psychological burden on administrators to forget the rancor and animosity of the immediate past and get on with the business of directing the operation of schools."

Among the association's suggestions for principals after the strike are the following:

- Exert a sincere effort to adopt a "business as usual" attitude.
- Depersonalize responses to comments or questions regarding the strike, conditions which led to it or staff relations following its conclusion.
- Become intimately aware of the provisions of the agreement.
- Watch for signs of tension between striking and nonstriking staff members. Deal with such problems fairly but vigorously.
- Remember with respect to post-strike tension, staff members will seldom be coming to you with "solutions" but rather as part of the "problem." You will often find yourself in a mediatory role with respect to intrastaff relations.

- Every effort should be made to prevent classroom discussion of the strike.

- Implement any changes in regulations resulting from the agreement as quickly as possible, given either legal or otherwise unavoidable administrative constraints.

- Finally, bear in mind that you are the "front-line" administrator. You represent the board, superintendent and, most importantly, the public at that level basic to the development of good employer/employe relations. Yours is a heavy responsibility!

The Role of the Superintendent

"Superintendents who find themselves in a post-strike situation," says AASA, "need to exercise every skill at their command in the area of group process and human motivation." They must, AASA says, "weave their way through the post-strike minefield of human emotions and not let up in leadership. They must be particularly persistent in helping people to help themselves."

One of the first things superintendents must do, says the administrators' association, is "to move quickly to meet the deep feelings of guilt, defeat, victory, anger, envy, hate .

And the way to do that, says AASA, is "to refocus differing segments of the educational community from their hard-fought polarized positions to a neutral meeting ground – the education of children.

"This is a slow process, but it is a process. It must be pursued by the superintendent and all administrative personnel with an awareness that all groups need positive, carefully constructed outlets for winding down."

Generally, says AASA, the superintendent in a post-strike situation must:

- Anticipate the emotions of all groups.

- Foster a climate for educational renewal.

- Totally brief all staff on new contract terminology.

- Launch a community and teacher involvement program in getting things together again.

"Strike Manual," published by the Assn. of California School Administrators and Negotiation Support Services, lists these four basic rules for post-strike administrative activities:

1. **Forget the Past** – District administrators must adopt the attitude that "the strike is over and the issues are settled" even though during the strike their professional and personal lives were disrupted. The best thing is to forget the past and concentrate on the students. All administrators should be instructed to refuse to discuss the strike or any of the issues in the strike. And, they should try to discourage any debates on the strike among staff members and students. Most immediate reference to the strike should be a letter from the superintendent announcing its end, the terms of settlement and expressing a wish that the schools return to normal.

2. **Separate Strike Replacements from Strikers** – If the district has hired substitutes to replace strikers, they should keep them separated from returning strikers. Generally, strikers should not return to the classroom until the morning following the settlement. This allows the district to notify substitutes and volunteers not to report the next day.

3. **Do Not Hold Reconciliation Meetings** – There is a natural tendency on the part of building administrators to try and hold mass faculty meetings after the strike to reconcile differences. Experience has shown, however, that such meetings tend to be fraught with difficulty. No matter how long a strike lasts, strikers have lost more than their non-striking peers. One junior high school principal had a faculty party at his home two weeks after a strike to re-establish his "educational family." Two hours after the party started, he had to call the police to break up a fight between strikers and non-strikers.

4. **Do Not Differentiate Between Strikers and Non-Strikers** – Regardless of the strike settlement agreement, the building administrator is in a position to make life "hard" for employes who went on strike. Principals should be cautioned that the fastest way to divide their staffs is to discriminate against strikers. Building administrators should avoid any jokes or personal remarks about the strike and should do everything possible to treat all employes the same and administer the district policies impartially.

The Ohio School Boards Assn. has its own list of a superintendent's responsibilities after the strike. It reads:

1. Exert a sincere effort to adopt a "business as usual" attitude.

2. Depersonalize your attitude and behavior toward the association in any responses to strike-related units.

3. Make certain that the provisions of the agreement are communicated to all administrators, especially principals who were not directly involved in the negotiations or who do not serve on a planning council.

4. Assure that the provisions of the agreement are published and distributed to staff, board and media.

The Role of the Board of Education

"Perhaps the most difficult readjustment," according to AASA, "is felt by some school board members whose original high regard for teachers as a professional group has degenerated to enmity, spite and vengeance-to-be-wreaked. Some school board members may never again look with positive feelings on administrative recommendations which benefit teachers in any way, whatsoever."

And these attitudes, AASA adds, are "the best argument for a school district to employ a professional negotiator, and thus remove the board member from the frustrations of the negotiations table.

"Board member negotiators who are not skilled bargainers do not like to lose," AASA says, "and frequently cannot or will not forgive and forget."

And heated reaction by board members even after the strike is over is a perfect example of how to hinder the readjustment process.

Board members will be particularly hard-pressed, says AASA, to answer charges from the community that they "gave away the store," particularly if the settlement results in higher taxes. And other board members will be tempted "to angrily denounce the deleterious effects the strike had on the educational program and the children."

Yet silence may better serve the interests of that very same educational program and those very same children.

That's not to say that members of a post-strike board of education should crawl into their collective shell and say nothing, no matter who is charging them with what.

There certainly will be answers called for at public board meetings on just what the settlement costs, what effect the strike had on the educational program, what actions are going to be taken against striking teachers, etc.

And calmly and rationally, with facts and figures and with carefully thought-out policy statements – rather than with off-the-cuff personal opinions and emotions – these questions must be answered.

The tone of the response to questions like these will go a long way toward setting the tone of the overall post-strike process.

The Ohio School Boards Assn. sees the post-strike role of a school board as follows:

1. Exert a sincere effort to adopt a "business as usual" attitude.

2. Avoid public comment that may reflect negative attitudes toward classes of employes or the association. "Martyrdom" is the best kind of employe organizer.

3. Be certain that any actions taken or statements made contribute to the improvement of educational opportunity or climate for the students of the district.

4. Hold a meeting with the superintendent and principals and fully critique the pre-strike period, the strike itself and the post-strike period.

Berkeley's Louise Stoll warns that "board members make a mistake if they assume that their duty to communicate to the public ends when the contract is successfully concluded or the strike is over."

Whether the negotiations have been positive and constructive or hostile and negative, she says, there is still a lot of communicating to be done. She explains:

> If a contract is negotiated in a manner where mutual respect is gained by each party, and the compromise process has been successful, the board's role in communicating can be extremely constructive.

On the other hand, she says, after hostile negotiations "it is a virtual certainty that the employe organization will attempt to sell whatever resolution is reached as an enormous victory for their positions." Such a stance, she adds, "can be extremely damaging to the image of the board and misleading to the public with regard to the facts involved in the settlement."

Thus, Stoll says, "it is essential that the board take the initiative in publicizing to the community the exact nature of the settlement."

One effective way for the board of education to aid in the process of putting the pieces together again after a strike is to jointly adopt a no-reprisal clause with the leadership of the teacher association or union.

While AASA cautions that in drawing up a no-reprisal clause "the district negotiator should be extremely careful in the drafting of such language," the association approves of joint action against reprisals since "unions, like management, do not condone such activities."

AASA says such a clause should state that anyone guilty of reprisals after the strike, particularly reprisals involving violence, will be subject to disciplinary or legal action.

And that no-reprisal clause should be communicated as quickly as possible to every employe in the school district.

In Wilmington, this was done through a joint letter to employes from the presidents of the board of education and the teachers' federation. (See p. 63.)

The Role of the Communication Specialist

At this point, the school district public relations specialist should be a communications quarterback, advising the board, the superintendent, the principals, and possibly the teachers, too, on the best ways to communicate the urgency of reconciliation.

The communications specialist must be aware of where the lingering claims of victory or defeat are coming from, who is making them, and why. The school PR person must be in a position to advise the superintendent or the board not to fire back at those few persons who would persist in preserving the animosities of a strike.

If the communications specialist becomes aware of charges that must be answered, it is his or her duty to begin constructing a calm, rational, objective answer for the superintendent or board

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

In accordance with the recently negotiated collective bargaining agreement between the Federation and the Board, wherein a no-reprisal clause was included, you are hereby notified that:

"The Board and the Federation agree that no employe shall be punished or rewarded, discriminated against or harassed, on account of the employe's activities or lack of activities relating to the work stoppage. . .

"The Board agrees that any employe whose services have been terminated because of the strike and all notices and letters of termination of employment with regard to the strike shall be rescinded and rendered null and void ab initio. All such notices or letters and all internal communications, except pay roll records, concerning same which are part of the employe's personnel file shall be destroyed."

The Federation and the Board jointly express their desire that everyone should begin to work together to provide the best education possible for our students.

president, an answer that can serve as the alternative to the impulse to substitute rhetoric for fact.

The communications specialist should be the cap over the panic button, the glass in the fire alarm box, the "safety" on the rifle of retribution, the explosives expert ready to defuse the bombs aimed at the new born and relatively unsteady labor peace.

He or she must also be the human relations expert preaching human respect and understanding in the wake of the bitter memories of a strike.

In short, after the strike, the communications expert might do well to remember John Dewey's definition of communication.

"Communication," Dewey wrote, "is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. It modifies the disposition of both parties who partake of it."

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